

God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. God endorsed Abraham's sense perception of the heavens. Therefore, if our greatest scientists engage this identical sense perception, we should not ignore their validated experiments in favor of our cherished beliefs; certainly when we have not studied what they have.

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Weekly Parsha

Vayerah

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"I will descend now and see. If they have done as the cries that have come to Me, I will destroy them. And if not, I will know." (Beresheit 18:21)

Our parasha discusses the destruction of Sedom. This pasuk

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SPACE & TIME

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



As Rabbi Chaim Ozer once explained: the universe must be literally billions of years old. But he didn't stop there; he offered an irrefutable proof. I will first offer an introduction.

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(Vayerah cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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introduces the narrative. Hashem tells Avraham that the cries of the people of Sodom have risen before Him. He will descend in order to judge the wickedness of the people. If these cries truly and accurately reflect the evil of the people, then He will destroy the city and the surrounding communities.

There are a number of problems presented by this pasuk. We will consider three of these difficulties. First, the pasuk describes Hashem as “descending.” Hashem is not a material being. We cannot ascribe descending or ascending to Him. It is clear that this term is used by the Torah as a metaphor. But, what does the metaphor represent? Second, the pasuk implies that Hashem conducted some sort of analysis of Sodom. There was some issue that Hashem investigated before he decided whether He would destroy the city. But, Hashem is omniscient. What further information can He have required that added to His knowledge? Finally, the pasuk seems to imply that Hashem conducted some sort of analysis in order to secure this new information. Can we identify the nature of this process of analysis? In other words, can we determine the means by which Hashem secured the additional information that was essential to His decision?

Let us begin with the first two issues. The pasuk refers to Hashem as “descending.” The same phrase is used earlier in the Chumash. The Torah describes Hashem as “descending” in order to investigate the activities of the Dor Haflagah – the generation of the Dispersion.[1] This post-Deluge generation joined together with the goal of unifying all of humanity. They wished to build a single civilization that would encompass all humankind. Hashem

“descended” to judge this generation. Based on this judgment, He intervened in their plans by bringing about the Dispersion.

Rashi explains that in both instances – in our parasha and in the narrative regarding the Dor Haflagah – the Torah’s description of Hashem “descending” is intended to communicate that He conducted an investigation. However, Rashi points out that this message cannot be understood in a literal sense. Hashem is omni-

scient and does not need to conduct an investigation in order to secure additional information. Instead, these references are to be understood homiletically. In both instances, the Torah is telling us that a judge should only render a decision after thoroughly investigating the particulars of the case. The Torah ascribes a process of investigation to Hashem in order to establish a standard of conduct for mortal judges. The Torah is telling us that just as Hashem only rendered a judgment based upon a full consideration of all of the elements of the case, so, too, we are only to pass judgment after conducting a thorough investigation.[2]

Rashi’s interpretation is unusual. He asserts that the Torah ascribes a material activity to Hashem-- not as a metaphor, but, in order

to teach a lesson regarding our own conduct. In other words, although the Torah often uses material expressions in describing Hashem and His activities, these terms are usually mere metaphors. Here, Rashi asserts that the terminology is not for some action emanating from Hashem. In this case, the phrase is not related to Hashem in any sense. It is merely designed to teach us a lesson as to the manner in which we should conduct ourselves.

Why does the Torah specifically employ the figure of “descending?” Rashi discusses this



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issue. He explains that the term “descent” has an idiomatic meaning. It refers to making a judgment based upon the ultimate outcome of a pattern of behavior. The people of Sedom were not judged solely on the basis of their behavior at the moment. They were judged based upon the ultimate outcome of these behaviors. Hashem considered the direction in which the people were progressing. He punished them because they were progressing towards absolute evil. However, Rashi does not identify the specific outcome towards which the people were progressing.

Radak offers a different explanation of the figure of “descending.” He explains that when Hashem involves Himself in the affairs of human beings, He is descending from His exalted honor. Hashem is the Creator. He is exalted over all of His creations. When Hashem interferes with the natural universe that He created in order to save humanity or punish humankind, He is descending from His glory and majesty.[3] Netziv expands on this explanation. He explains that Hashem created a universe governed by a natural order. It is His will that this natural order be preserved. However, He interferes with the natural order in two situations. First, He exercises His providence and interferes with this order in order to help the righteous. Second, He interrupts the natural order in order to punish the wicked. When we act in a manner that demands providential punishment, we are – metaphorically – requiring Hashem to “descend” from His throne of majesty to correct our behavior.[4]

Both of these explanations present some difficulties. Rashi does answer our first two questions. According to Rashi, our third question is not relevant. Hashem did not conduct an actual analysis. The phraseology employed by the Torah is not intended to be applied to Hashem. However, Rashi’s explanation is somewhat radical. As we have noted, it is unusual for the Torah to ascribe a material behavior to Hashem that does not have a metaphorical meaning. In addition, Rashi asserts that Sedom was not punished for its present behavior. Instead, the people were destroyed because they were destined to perform some great evil. Yet, Rashi does not indicate the specific nature of this evil.

Radak’s and Netziv’s explanation also answers our first two questions. Yet, they seem to leave our third question unanswered. What was the nature of the investigation performed by Hashem?

Sforno offers a comprehensive explanation of the events in our parasha that resolves all three of our difficulties. He begins by adopting an element of Rashi’s explanation. Like Rashi,

he asserts that the term “descending” must be understood idiomatically. When the Torah describes Hashem as descending, it is identifying a particular type of judgment. Hashem is making a judgment based upon the ultimate outcome of a pattern of behavior. But, at this juncture, Sforno extends his explanation beyond this initial observation. In each instance in which the figure of “descending” is employed, Sforno identifies the outcome that demanded Hashem’s interference. Let us focus on our parasha. What outcome demanded the destruction of the people of Sedom?

A corrupt society can reverse itself. Sforno asserts that as long as the potential for repentance exists, the society can be spared. However, there is a point at which the society can no longer reverse its direction. At some point, repentance is no longer possible. This occurs when no dissent is tolerated – when no one remains that can provide the society with a new direction. When all members of the society have accepted and champion the corrupt values of the civilization, there is not opportunity for reevaluation and repentance. If this point is reached, the society can only continue in its deterioration into absolute evil.[5]

Hashem “descended” in order to test Sedom. He designed a test to determine whether Sedom had reached the point at which there was no longer an opportunity to repent. What was this test?

“And the two angels came to Sedom in the evening and Lote was sitting at the gate.”
(Berseshiet 19:1)

The Torah tells us that three angels came to visit Avraham. They foretold the birth of Yitzchak. After taking leave from Avraham, two of these angels proceeded to Sedom. The angles told Lote that Sedom would be destroyed. They urged him to gather his family and flee the city. Lote left with his wife and two daughters. Lote’s wife died during their flight. But, Lote and his daughters escaped the destruction of Sedom. It is clear from the Torah that these angels had two missions. They were charged with the mission of destroying Sedom, and they were sent to save Lote and his family. However, the Torah describes in detail the activities of these angels in Sedom and their interaction with the people of the city. Why is this information included in the account?

“They had not yet lied down and the people of the city, the people of Sedom, surrounded the house – from the young to the old, all of the people, from every quarter.” (Beresheit 19:4)

The angels came to Lote and agreed to spend the night in his home. The people of Sedom did not extend hospitality to strangers and were not willing to tolerate Lote’s offer of lodging to these visitors. They surrounded Lote’s home and demanded that he deliver his guests to them. The Torah explains that all of the people of Sedom were involved in this protest – the young and old, all of the people, from every quarter. Why does the Torah provide such a detailed description of the mob that surrounded Lote’s home?

Sforno explains that the Torah’s intent is clear. The message is that the entire population of Sedom – without exception – joined into this mob that congregated against Lote. There was no dissent. Not one opposed the mob. No one even held back from joining the mob. The opposition to Lote was unanimous and complete.

Sforno explains that this was the test. Hashem provided the people of Sedom with an opportunity to demonstrate either that they deserved to be spared, or to be destroyed. The test was simple. Would anyone rebuke this mob? Would anyone refuse to join in the attack on Lote’s home? The people of Sedom failed the test. There was no opposition to the evil designs of the people. Every person joined the mob. The people of Sedom failed the test. They lost their last opportunity to be spared. No one in Sedom was willing to oppose the evil of the citizens. No one resisted the urge to join the mob. Repentance was not longer possible.[6] ■

[1] Sefer Bereshiet 11:5

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 11:5, 18:21.

[3] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 11:5.

[4] Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv), Commentary Hamek Davar on Sefer Beresheit 11:5.

[5] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 18:21.

[6] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 18:21.

Science & Torah

SPACE & TIME

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When we see a star, or anything, what we see is, in actuality, the light emitted from the object. (We do not see objects at all, but their reflected light) In a pitch-black room full of colorful flowers, all that is seen is blackness. When the light is turned on, the light shines on the flowers, bounces off in all directions, and if a person is standing there, some of that light enters his eye. The brain then immediately processes the perception and the person 'understands' that there are colorful flowers in front of him. We call this understanding "sight". Remember: we do not truly "see the object" but rather, its emitted reflection. Just as when viewing a mirror, we do not see the true object, but its reflection, the case is the same when we look directly at any object: we do not see the object, but the light that bounces off of it. When we close our eyes and feel an object, then we perceive the real object. But this is not the case with regards to vision, or sound. In these latter two sensations, what we

perceive is not the object, but either light, or air disturbance that our ears translate into sensations.

If we distance ourselves from a man using a hammer, the further away we move, the longer it takes until we hear, what our eyes see: he hits a nail, but we don't hear it at that same moment...but a few seconds later. This is because sound travels slower than light. So our eyes perceive an event, faster than our ears hear it. But light too travels at a set speed. And the further away we are from a visual event, the longer it takes for us to see that event. Although we may see the sun right now, it actually takes eight minutes for sunlight to reach the Earth, and our eyes. So when we see sunrise, in actuality, the sun has already risen eight minutes ago. But being 93,000,000 miles from Earth, the sun's rays need time to travel all that distance. Another example: if somehow the sun exploded, we would still see the sun completely whole for another eight minutes. This is because the event of that explosion created a light image, which is now traveling in all directions. Standing on the Earth, we first perceive that light eight minutes after the fact. Again, we do not see "object and events", but we see the light that travels from those events, and that is how we perceive visually. Now we arrive at Rabbi Chaim Ozer's proof of the age of the universe.

A "light-year" is the measure of distance traveled by light in one year. Astronomers use light-years to measure distances of extremely distant stars and galaxies. This distance light travels in one year is quite far: about 6 trillion miles. If a star exploded, and that star was one light-year away from Earth, we would not see

that explosion for an entire year subsequent to that explosion. Let's say the star was 10,000,000 light years from Earth. Looking at the sky tonight, you may see stars that are no longer in true existence. But since their light takes 10,000,000 years to reach our eyes, we first see 10,000,000-year-old events on that star...tonight! We are truly looking back in time! But here's the clincher: this proves that the universe must be at least 10,000,000 years old. How? For if that star's light is reaching us, this means that 10,000,000 years transpired, so that its light could reach us. The every fact that we see stars this far away proves that the universe existed for this amount of time. But scientists actually place the age of the universe at about 15 billion years old.

As Dr. Gerald Schroeder explains in "Genesis and the Big Bang", the discrepancy between our Jewish year 5767, and the 15 billion, is in fact...no contradiction. Tests performed using precision clocks proved that time is relative. This means that time does not pass at the same speed in all portions of the universe.

One experiment placed a cesium clock on an aircraft, and another identically precise clock on the ground. After the return of the aircraft, the clocks were compared, and less time had elapsed on the aircraft's clock. Inertia – the force felt during acceleration – is equal to gravity. With greater gravity, time moves slower. Thus, the further the aircraft was from the Earth, the less was the Earth's gravitational pull, since gravity weakens with distance. Additionally, the inertia of the aircraft added to

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Science & Torah

the slower time passage relative to Earth.

Another lesson from Dr. Schroeder's book concerning Einstein's time relativity included a more theoretical, but equally compelling argument. Imagine a laboratory, and a high-speed spaceship. Now, standing in the lab is one individual, Adam. (Fig. 1) He has a twin brother Josh who is on the spaceship next to him. Adam is standing in "Position A" at one end of lab, a room 50 feet long. He is holding a flashlight turned off. He points the light at the ceiling where there is a mirror suspended 25 feet across from him, and 10 feet higher than him. If Adam shines the light at that mirror, the angle of the mirror will reflect the beam back down at the other end of the room to "Point B", 50+ feet from Adam. The path of the light will be triangular, traveling over 25 feet up to the mirror, and another 25+ feet down to "Point B" at the other end of the lab. That's over 50 feet of travel. Now, Josh who is also at "Point A" powers up the spaceship, and at the exact moment that Adam turns on the light, Josh and the spaceship thrust forward. Josh times his speed so that he arrives at "Point B" exactly when the light reaches "Point B". (Fig. 2) From Adam's perspective, the path of the light was triangular. From Josh's perspective, he sees the light beam over his head going upwards at 90 degrees, and then coming back down at him, since he is moving with the light. As the light beam ascends higher and then returns downward, Josh stays directly underneath it every step of the way. Another illustration will help.

Imagine a man on a moving train. He drops his keys. To him, the keys fall downward, in a straight line to the floor. But to someone at the

station watching as the train zooms by, the keys move on downwards on an angle.

Since Josh and the light beam were moving together, to Josh, the light moves in a straight line up and down. The distance traveled by the light from Josh's perspective is only 20 feet, since the ceiling is 10 feet over his head. The light goes directly vertical up 10 feet to the mirror, and vertically down 10 feet, in a straight line.

Light speed is constant everywhere in the universe. This has been proven. If we ask Adam how far the light traveled, he tells us 50+ feet. If we ask Josh, he says 20 feet. Adam tells us the time that elapsed for the light to travel 50 feet from "Point A" to "Point B" is let's say 50+ microseconds. If we ask Josh, he tells us the light traveled only 20 feet, and it took exactly 20 microseconds. Yet, the one event started and ended at the same moment for both individuals. Thus, we have two individuals, who see the light traveling two very different distances, and each recorded different amounts of elapsed time. For Josh, less time has passed, only 20 microseconds. Adam timed his event at 50+ microseconds. Thus, with increased inertia, or acceleration, time slows down, relative to other parts of the universe. Compared to Adam, Josh is now younger. Yet, only one event took place.

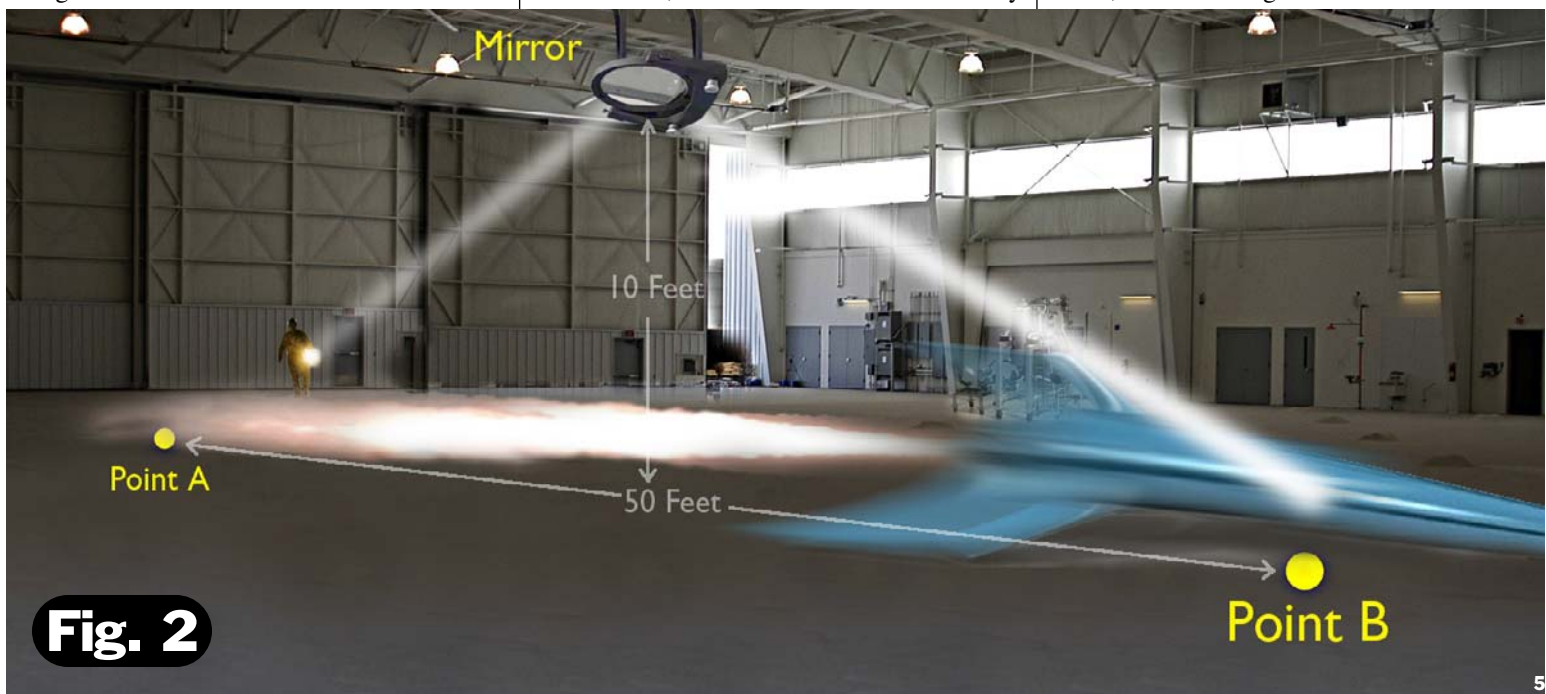
We can apply this truth to the two different ages of the universe. From the perspective of the Earth, moving at high speeds away from the rest of the universe, only 5767 years has elapsed. From the perspective of the universe, the Earth and the universe is truly 15,000,000,000 years old!

Remember, Rabbi Chaim Ozer already

proved that the stars are millions, if not billions of years old. They have to be, since their light that reaches us took all those years to leave them, and reach Earth.

Amazing as this idea is, it must be true. But the only reason people might be skeptical, is because they have not studied the laws of the universe. People used to believe the Earth was flat. They thought it ridiculous that the Earth was a globe. Today, we feel the opposite; we are surprised if anyone doubts their senses, having seen pictures of a round Earth taken from space. Well, if our senses are what we trust, then we must admit the perceptions of Einstein and other's who repeatedly found the same results. Time does not pass at the same speed in all portions of the universe.

What we should end with is a greater humility towards ideas we hear, which oppose our current beliefs. If the universe contains such amazing laws, which are true regardless of what we initially thought, and the Creator also created the Torah, we must be equally humble when assessing what value and truths the Torah contains. If we are irreligious, but accept science, we are in a contradiction. God created both: natural and Torah laws. We must recognize that our reluctance to observe the Torah does not come from any in-depth study that invalidated Torah ideals. We neglect Torah observance because our emotions do not desire restriction. But if we can be more objective and get past our emotional rejection, and take time to study Torah, we will all find a deeper appreciation for the Creator, whose intelligence never ceases to awe us. We will find the passage of time while studying Torah to appear as an instant, and the Torah, as illuminating as the sun and stars. ■



Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Blurred

Reader: Dear Rabbi, Just wanted to thank you for your response. It was brought to my attention by my teacher. I know the nations don't possess knowledge of the Torah, however, I must ask:

If we don't study how are we to find the wisdom to rid injustice, be kind, merciful and come to correct ideas about G'd? I believe that Solomon's dedication of the Temple was clear in saying, 1 Kings 8:41-43, "...those who are not of thy people Israel", "are to also fear and know Hashem just like Israel does". I don't find the idea of convert there. Yes, one may choose to, but if all humanity converts just to study Torah then we miss the role that Israel plays in our life journey to acknowledge God.

I understand your point of "blurring the lines". I think, however, that it involves the Gentiles taking up the traditions and live life like Israel lives their life. That would "blur the lines". The idea of studying Torah, which Jeremiah clearly says we will eventually come to ask about, would not blur the lines of culture. We are to learn how to live a moral life, not change our culture to be just like Israel's culture. We lack "mesora", therefore, we can't

claim to know what Israel knows first hand. Studying the Torah helps us understand and become more receptive of Israel because it teaches us why Israel is G-d's chosen people; G-d's only First Born Son and Servant.

This is my reason for questioning the reasoning behind the statement of Gentiles should not study Torah. I thank you for considering my question and I thank you for taking the time to respond to it.

Humbly, Hiram

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Hiram, you quoted accurately: "Those who are not of thy people Israel are to also fear and know Hashem just like Israel does". I had mentioned last week that a wise Rabbi taught that in areas of perfection as the case you cite, a Gentile must study Torah, just as a Jew. This includes all areas of morality and knowledge of God. ■

Incomplete

Reader: Hello, and I have a comment Rabbi. In one of your answers to a questioner, who penned this to you:

"Moreover, many of the places supposedly founded by Noah's children were in existence long before!!! How can we get around this problem? I have seen discussions of it on blogs, and the internet. But none have satisfied me. I looked at one of the blogs you have quoted in the past, but the rabbi there had a very strange approach that is hard to accept. What is the answer to this dilemma? Should I deny my mind? Thank you, Jonathan

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You should ask yourself why you accept an account of 30,000-year-old civilizations, over accounts of the Torah. Why do you deem those more credible? What is your basis of reasoning?"

He was referring to a 4000 yr old dating account for the flood, just as the soul of man was created 5767 yr ago by literal accounting. Yet I have listened to discussion by religious men, such as Dr Gerald Schroeder, and Harold Gans, the mathematician, who have used dating systems referencing Nachmanides, for example- who's dating system brought the age of the universe to something like 12-13 billion yrs old, and of course, the discussions of what is a 'yom' a day, and how to explain that difference in dating differences. I thought your answer was rather incomplete, and lacking in that regard. —Good Shabbos, Mark Goldberg

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: This was a follow up of an ongoing dialogue. I was attempting to address one issue at this point, namely, his acceptance of secular accounts of 30,000-year-old civilizations, while not accepting Torah accounts. I meant to bring this inconsistency to the fore. I felt brevity would focus on that issue.

But the time discrepancy is addressed in the cover article of this week's issue.

Good to hear from you Mark. ■

Mixed Up

Reader: Dear Rabbi Ben Chaim, I was in contact with you previously on issues of emunah, I have a question for you. Regarding the Rabbinical claim for the giving of the Oral Law at Sinai, what if this is contradicted by the Prophets? For example, Ezek. 44:

17. "When they enter the gates of the inner court, they are to wear linen clothes; they must not wear any woolen garment while ministering at the gates of the inner court or inside the temple. 18. They are to wear linen turbans on their heads and linen undergarments around their waists. They must not wear anything that makes them perspire. 19. When they go out into the outer court where the people are, they are to take off the clothes they have been ministering in and are to leave them in the sacred rooms, and put on other clothes, so that they do not consecrate the people by means of their garments'."

However, the Rabbis claim that the Cohen Gadol – the High Priest – wore Shatnez i.e., wool mixed with linen. This is even how some Chumashim "translate" the laws, e.g. the Stone Edition. What do you think?

Regards, Eddie

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Anyone – prophet or otherwise – who institutes a permanent change in Oral or Written Torah has violated God's words. This case however is in line with God's words: Shatnez is not prohibited in the priest's garments. Nor is it prohibited in Tzitzis. And this is not a violation, but part of the very laws of Shatnez.

For those who are unaware, wearing garments comprising both wool and linen is the Torah prohibition called "Shatnez".

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Letters

I believe the answer to your question is the same as to why fringes - Tzitzis - may include both wool and linen without violating Shatnez. (Rambam, Hilchos Tzitzis; 3:6)

Our refrain from mixing wool and linen is how we remind ourselves of two elements, which we may not mix, that is, the emotions and the intellect. I heard from a Rabbi quoting Ibn Ezra who said that Shatnez recalls to mind those things, which are "planted in the heart" and should not be mixed. Separating these two parts of our makeup – our intellect and our emotions – we approach God. In other words, we guide our emotions - they do not guide us.

But, Shatnez is required only during those times and activities when we are not engaged in the commands of God which are inherently perfect, and perfecting. If however, priests find themselves servicing God in the Temple, there is no danger of the emotions and intellect running awry. This being the case, garments, and curtains in the Temple are not subject to this law. While in the Temple, our thoughts are engaged with God, and we have the "check system" already functioning. Shatnez is then redundant. Similarly, when donning the Tallis or Tzitzis, we have no concern for the mixture of wool and linen. We are involved in God's commands, and are thereby removed from the corrupting forces of the instinctual - the emotions. Here too, Shatnez would be unnecessary.

Having brought up the topic, at this point, I will reprint an article on Shatnez. ■

Shatnez

This past week, my close friend Adam mentioned that he and his mother Jean were discussing the Torah law concerning Shatnez. Jean had asked what the idea is behind this law. This is an important question, as the Rabbis state, "Our own instincts and the idolaters target Shatnez with accusations against Judaism." As if to say, "This law seems so bizarre. What can possibly be corrupt about wearing these two materials? Judaism is unfounded." Ramban states that the masses do not understand Shatnez, although they agree that crossbreeding has a purpose. But Ramban adds that although a "statute" (commonly misunderstood as bereft of reason), "every word of God's is tried". (Proverbs, 30:5) This means that all of God's commands contain reasons, including "chukim" or statutes.

"Shatnez" refers to the Torah law prohibiting the wearing of wool and linen together. There are many parameters: prohibitions relating to a single garment woven of both wool and linen;

wearing wool garments over linen garments and vice versa; what material finishing processes qualify to violate this law; and many other issues. For brevity's sake, we will simply refer to "Shatnez" as all prohibited forms, without going into the Halachik distinctions.

We must note, that this law is not its own category. In the Torah, we find Shatnez mentioned twice, together with two other prohibitions: crossbreeding animals, and crossbreeding plants. Let us review the Torah's words on these three laws.

Lev. 19:19: "My statutes you shall guard; your animals you shall not crossbreed mixed species; your field you shall not plant intermixed species; and a mixed garment Shatnez, do not wear."

Deut. 22:9-11: "You shall not plant your vineyard with a mixture, lest the growth of the seed which you plant and the produce of the vineyard become forbidden. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. You shall not wear Shatnez, wool and linen together."

We learn from their repetition that these three laws are not joined coincidentally, and certainly from the Torah's joining all three laws in a single verse: they share a common thread. (We have a tradition from the Rabbis that individual verses contain related ideas. All concepts found in a single, Torah verses are joined somehow, thereby, explaining why they are found together in one verse.) It is not hard to suggest how these three laws are related: in all three cases, one is prohibited from intermingling various species. However, I understand that I cannot crossbreed living things, as this is where reproduction of new species may occur. But regarding Shatnez, this case is the mixing of lifeless substances: the wool and linen are no longer attached to their life source. Why then must I not mix that which cannot regenerate new, crossbred species? Furthermore, where do we see that animal and vegetable can be interbred, even while living? (We will address Shatnez shortly)

Crossbreeding: Two Categories

From this general observation, we arrive at our first insight: the prohibition to crossbreed can take place in but two areas: animal and vegetable. This is because there are no other existences, which "reproduce". Ramban also points to this categorization. Ramban cites many reasons, which justify this prohibition. For one, crossbreeding destroys the pure species, creating a new one, which is Divinely unintended. Additionally, the new species' offspring cannot beget others. This is seen in the case of a mule; a

species that is the result of crossbreeding, and cannot reproduce with other mules. This is also the case with vegetation. I suggest that perhaps this result of infertility is actually part of God's design of nature: He designed reproductive species in a way, that when crossbred, the offspring cannot reproduce, thereby underlining man's error. Had crossbred species' offspring been fertile, nothing in nature would indicate a flaw in crossbreeding. However, as the offspring cannot reproduce, this infertility points back to the original sin. Thus, God's system is not simply perfect in its normal function, but when abused, nature is designed to deliver a message to man regarding his precise abuse. Infertility of crossbred species teaches man that the Designer of nature does not wish crossbreeding: the act of intermingling in the fertilization process is signaled as an error, in the area of infertile offspring. I find this profound.

Ramban states that one who crossbreeds also violates God's will that only certain species exists. God said in Genesis that each species should bring forth "liminayhu", "according to their own kind". This is a grave corruption, as man assumes he knows better than God. We understand the gravity Ramban places on violators.

Ramban also quotes Rabbis Simon and Chanina, who suggest a reason for the term "My statutes you shall guard", as referring to the very natural laws which govern life. These Rabbis state that "Chukos", "laws", refer to natural law. These laws are the actual causes, which continue to govern all species in their reproduction of similar offspring. The maple tree, for example, does not reproduce maple trees, of its own. There is a law guiding this phenomenon, non-existent in the substance of 'maple tree'. A law is of the metaphysical realm, which governs the latter. Similarly, what keeps rocks "solid" substances are God's, created laws. We learned in chemistry that the very same molecules found in liquids, might be found in solids: lava is a perfect example. However, the Master of the universe has decided when a molecule should form part of each. His laws determine this. We tend to view the physical world as the be all and end all of creation. But as we learn in the first two chapters of Genesis, God describes two aspects of Creation. The first act refers to the substance, while the second "creation" refers to the laws governing those creations. Crossbreeding, then, violates and corrupts these very natural laws. Therefore, there is sound reasoning why God includes in the laws of crossbreeding the introductory, and rarely used phrase, "My statutes you shall guard." For one who crossbreeds not only corrupts the physical

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Letters

species, but also creates new species, thereby, convoluting the laws of nature. (An example is the infertility of mules.) How does Shatnez fit into this? Shatnez doesn't lend itself to interbreeding. Why is it prohibited?

What is "Shatnez"?

Quoting Rashi, and disagreeing with him, Ramban identifies three words from which the conjunctive term "SHaTNeZ" is derived. Spelled in Hebrew, Shatnez is "SH", "T", and "NZ". "SH" refers to the word "Shua" – combed, "T" refers to the word "Tavui" – spun, and "NZ" refers to "NuZ" – twisted. Therefore, Shatnez refers to that which is combed, spun and twisted, meaning threads in a completed form. Ramban critiques Rashi, for according to him, only when all three processes are found, is there a prohibition. However, the Rabbis taught that if one does not complete all three processes, yet, the prohibition remains, as in a case where one takes two ropes, each one consisting exclusively of one material, tying them together. Ramban concludes: the three processes are "Scripturally" prohibited, but even in the case where all three are not found, a "Rabbinic" prohibition still exists.

Ramban offers the reasoning that Shatnez guards us from the other two prohibitions. It is a "fence" of sorts. By complying with the laws of Shatnez, we will be safeguarded. As we accustom ourselves to guard against mingling in clothing, and we will thereby be more sensitive to the mingling of species. Ramban then quotes Maimonides' reasoning as being sourced in idolatry. I will quote Maimonides here ("Guide to the Perplexed", Book III, Chap. 37):

"We have explained in our large work that it is prohibited to round the corners of the head, and to mar the corners of the beard, because it was the custom of idolatrous priests. For the same reason, the wearing of garments made of linen and wool is prohibited: the heathen priests adorned themselves with garments containing vegetable and animal material, whilst they held in their hand a seal made of a mineral. This you find written in their books."

We may ask why those idolaters developed the practice of mixing animal and vegetable, while also seizing minerals. Perhaps they too recognized these categories, including animal and vegetable, substances we cannot live without, and sought in their foolishness to manipulate them, so as to better procure them. Although violating God's will, idolatry has rhyme and reason, as it is caused by the human psyche, which follows precise behavioral patterns. However, these behavioral patterns are deviant ones.

Shatnez: Recalling Man's Nature

On the subject of the psyche, a Rabbi once taught a remarkable idea on Shatnez, based on the words of Ibn Ezra. Ibn Ezra taught that Shatnez is a "remembrance" law, as are other laws, such as the Sabbath, which is a "remembrance of the Egyptian Exodus." (Our freedom for Sabbath rest is due to God's redemption of the Jews.) Ibn Ezra states that Shatnez is a remembrance to those statutes "planted in the heart". This Rabbi asked, "What is planted in the heart, for which, we must have a remembrance via Shatnez? What is similar between Shatnez, and those things 'planted in the heart'?" He explained; "What are planted in man's heart are the intellect, and the emotions". "Heart" refers to both. We are commanded to "Love thy God with 'all' of your heart." This refers to the command that man must devote himself to God with all his heart, or "both" parts, i.e., the intellect and the emotions. I understand that the heart refers to both faculties, but where does Shatnez come in? The Rabbi said that Shatnez is a law prohibiting the mixture of two, diverse species, hinting to our need to prevent the mixture of our intellect and our emotions. This means to say, that man must be guided by intelligence, undiluted by his emotional desires. His choices in life must stem from rational thinking, not emotional impulses. Shatnez, then, is a command, which reminds man to keep his intellect free from his emotions. This is what Ibn Ezra hinted to by his own words, "and here I will hint to you a fundamental" which is "planted in the heart."

Ibn Ezra's words about those things "planted in the heart" are found in his commentary on Abraham's perfections, that he adhered to God's "guards, commands, statutes and Torah." In that commentary (Gen. 26:5) Ibn Ezra says "statutes" refers to Shatnez. Now, as Abraham had no Torah as we do, his act of keeping God's "statutes", means that he possessed this perfection of guiding his life by intelligence, and not emotions, in contrast to the idolaters. In his other commentary, (Lev. 19:19) Ibn Ezra says an enigmatic statement, "Know; that which is complete, is very complete, therefore it is said regarding Abraham, 'and he guards My guards, My commands, My statutes and My Torah'." Rabbi Reuven Mann expounded, "That which is very 'complete' is one who is completely in line with his intelligence. He does not dilute his intelligence with his emotions." We now understand the teaching of Ibn Ezra.

Hints

Perhaps this is why Ibn Ezra made use of a subtle teaching, a "hint", as opposed to spelling out his idea: he wished to convey that Shatnez is

essentially a "hinting" type of command. Thus, Ibn Ezra used the teaching mode of "hinting", which embellishes on the nature of Shatnez: it hints to something.

We may ask why must God give laws of such a nature, which only "hint" to an idea. Many others, like Mezuzah, are clearly understood, so their practice is clearly stated: we must contemplate God's existence and His oneness. Where is the need in the Torah system for laws, which "hint"?

I suggest as follows: a "hint" implies that the matter hinted to, is obscure. Most individuals do not readily see it. Otherwise, it can be taught outright, like Mezuzah. Shatnez hints to that which is obscure: man's nature. Freud once lectured on psychology, opening his discourse by admitting that his "subject", the human psyche, may not be laid out as a cadaver, concretely. He anticipated and sought to defend his attendees' critique on his "un-evidenced" theories. The study of psychology has this one, great hurdle: it is not as "empirical" as is biology, for example. We may visually examine the human body, but the human psyche has no visuals – it is greatly abstract. This is the case with regards to Shatnez: it refers to man's "unseen" nature, and therefore must be alluded to, by ways of hints. The nature of man is not a matter readily 'seen', so Shatnez, the laws concerning it, allude to its obscurity by their very "hinting" nature.

The Exception

Why are Tzitzis and the Priest's garments not governed by the law of Shatnez? In these two areas, one may combine wool and linen. My theory is that since one is involved in God's will when fulfilling these two commands, Shatnez is superfluous. His very act of wearing Tzitzis or priestly garb is itself a manner of following his intellect, i.e., God's will. Shatnez in these cases would serve no purpose.

We understand according to Ramban, Maimonides and Ibn Ezra that crossbreeding has many flaws. We also understand that crossbreeding may only apply in the two categories of existences, which are living, i.e., animal and vegetable. I suggest that these two commands not to crossbreed animals or plants function on one level: addressing the intermingling within a single category, either animal with animal, or vegetable with vegetable. But Shatnez is a case where one may not mix these very, basic categories of animal with vegetable. Perhaps this supports the Rabbi I mentioned earlier: Shatnez's basic categories parallel two other basic categories which are greatly distant: intellect and emotion. ■

God's Destruction of Sodom

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by student

When G-d advised Abraham of His decision to destroy Sodom, Abraham vigorously tried to prevent the destruction. He seemed to question G-d's judgment and seek some sort of reprieve for the people of Sodom from such an ostensibly, harsh verdict. However, when Abraham was commanded to take his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice, he attempted to fulfill G-d's will with alacrity. This puzzling contrast can be explained by analyzing G-d's system of justice with respect to mankind.

When a mortal judge sentences a criminal, the severity of the sentence is commensurate with the harshness of the offense. In pragmatic terms, the judgment is seeking to protect society and not benefit the criminal. However, G-d's punishment generally seeks to benefit man, so as to elevate the individual to act upon a higher moral plane. There are exceptions to this principle, as illustrated by the destruction of Sodom. G-d's decree to destroy Sodom was evidently not the type of judgment intended to benefit them. Rather, it was a determination by G-d that the people of Sodom were no longer deserving existence. The corruption of their lifestyles was without any merit that could justify their continued existence. However, Abraham's great love of his fellow man propelled him to be an advocate on their behalf. Abraham was questioning whether this type of punishment from G-d, clearly detrimental to the people of Sodom, was just. In Genesis chapter 18, verse 25, Abraham questioned "That be far from Thee to do after

this manner to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from Thee; shall not the Judge of all the Earth, do justly?" Abraham was questioning the justice in G-d's execution of this detrimental punishment. He was not questioning G-d, but rather trying to comprehend G-d's administration of justice. Could it be that G-d would slay a righteous person together with a wicked person? G-d's punishment of Sodom was obviously not beneficial to man, and Abraham was attempting to comprehend the method in which G-d's justice was being performed.

When Abraham was commanded by G-d to slaughter Isaac, no questions were asked. It was evident to Abraham that this was a decree from G-d, intended to benefit man. Isaac was not a wicked person, deserving extinction. On the contrary, Abraham realized that this commandment was being executed for the benefit of man. Thus, Abraham could not ask any questions. He realized that it is humanly impossible to comprehend how G-d's action is intended to benefit man. A person cannot question the manner in which a punishment from G-d benefits man. The benefit may be the punishment itself. However, if a judgment is of the kind that is meted out not for the benefit of man, but rather because man no longer deserves to exist, then a person can try to analyze the implementation of G-d's justice. Abraham, motivated by his great love of his fellow man and his intellectual nature, felt compelled to comprehend G-d's justice in destroying the entire city. However, this cannot be misconstrued as questioning how G-d's actions are just. This is beyond human comprehension.

The destruction of the city of Sodom also led to the rescue of Lot and the attempted effort to rescue his wife. This incident is a vivid example of the unfortunate manner in which people view many of the events recited in the Bible. People are overwhelmed with the miraculous fable-like qualities of these stories, which, when learned in their youth, are so appealing. All too often people do not overcome their childhood impressions of the Torah, and fail to appreciate the insightful teachings of the Torah. An analysis of the story of Lot and his wife can help us learn to value the beauty of the Torah's teachings.

Lot's wife was punished after she looked back at the destruction of the city of Sodom. Genesis chapter 19, verse 26 states, "And his wife looked back from behind him, and she

became a pillar of salt." To comprehend this punishment, we must also understand what was so terrible about her looking back.

Chazal, the Rabbis, teach us that she was turned into a pillar of salt because G-d's punishment is "measure for measure". Whenever guests were invited to the house, she didn't give them salt for their food. This is the reason she was turned into a pillar of salt. We must analyze the significance and the relationship between these two factors to appreciate G-d's justice being measure for measure.

The decree was that Sodom and all its citizens must be destroyed. Lot, however, was not truly a citizen of Sodom. The people of Sodom were not hospitable. Lot was. He greeted the angels and extended to them the courtesy of welcomed guests. In fact, Lot felt such compassion for his guests that when the people of Sodom wanted his guests to be handed over to them, Lot refused. His kindness to his guests even extended to his offering his daughters to the people of Sodom in their stead. However, he insisted that no harm be visited upon his guests. Thus Lot was charitable and deserved salvation since in spirit he was not truly a resident of Sodom. His kindness though, seems misplaced. He was kind to his guests at the expense of being promiscuous with his daughters. This seems to be an awkward type of kindness and rather immoral behavior.

However, we must appreciate Lot as an individual. The Torah is telling us about his exploits because he obviously was a worthy individual. He was not simply an eccentric fool, or the Torah would not elaborate the details of his salvation. Lot was a relative of Abraham, and was a member of his household. He learned the importance of kindness from Abraham and was a true *bal chessed*, a charitable person. Lot, though, did not adopt Abraham's concept of kindness. Lot was drawn to Sodom because of his instinctual desires. Genesis chapter 13 at the conclusion of verse 12 states "...and pitched his tent towards Sodom." Lot was attracted to the sexual permissiveness that pervaded Sodom. Although Lot espoused the concept of loving kindness, he had no concept of sexual morality. Therefore, his behavior was understandable. His theory was to treat his guests with the utmost kindness, even if it compromised the sexual integrity of his daughters. This to Lot was completely logical. It was entirely within

(continued on next page)

(Sodom continued from previous page)

Weekly Parsha

his framework. However, it evidences that he was completely divorced from any sense of "kedusha" - sanctity. This attests to the fact that Abraham's concept of kindness itself was totally different from Lot's. Kindness for Abraham was based upon his sense of justice. Abraham was the first person to recognize G-d as creator of the universe and possessed a great intellect. His kindness for his fellow man stemmed from his wisdom.

Lot had no philosophical basis for his kindness. It was just emotional goodness based on his sense of being nice. Thus, "kallos rosh", levity, was not inconsistent with his philosophy. He had no concept of sanctity whereby man was to live his life based upon a higher intellectual plane of kedusha. However, Lot was worthy of salvation. He practiced kindness to his fellow man and was not a consummate citizen of Sodom. Therefore, G-d sent the angels to save him from the destruction of Sodom since the decree was directed against the citizens of Sodom.

Lot's wife did not share her husband's value of kindness. The Rabbis tell us that she never gave her guests salt. This is truly indicative of her nature. Her withholding salt was an expression of her emotional state. She was a vicious person who disdained her fellow man. She really did not desire to accommodate guests that visited her house. However, because Lot was a kind person, she had no choice. But she felt compelled to withhold something, not to be totally giving to a fellow human being. Lot's wife was truly a citizen of Sodom. The Rabbis tell us that she partook. She was unable to be happy if another person was enjoying himself. However, since she was Lot's wife, G-d gave her an opportunity for salvation. If she did not look back at the destruction of Sodom, she would be saved. Lot's wife was very happy in Sodom. She shared the values of its citizens and totally identified with them. However, G-d gave her a chance to express a proper ideology. If she repented and realized her wrongdoings and was capable of emotional kindness towards her fellow man, as was Lot, then she would be spared. If she did not look back at Sodom's destruction, it would reflect that she no longer identified with that evil society, and thus, was worthy of salvation. However, she looked back. She still identified with the people of Sodom and felt badly that they were being destroyed. Therefore, her fate was sealed. She was destined to turn into a pillar salt. This reflected the salt that she was unable to share with her fellow man. Thus, G-d's method of punishment is measure for measure.

Abraham returned to the site of the destruc-

tion the following morning. Abraham also desired to look upon the destruction of Sodom. However, his looking was different than Lot's wife. Genesis chapter 19, verse 28 states, "Vayashkaf", Abraham looked, he investigated. "Vayashkaf" indicates not merely looking, but rather, viewing with an intellectual curiosity. Abraham had no identification with the people of Sodom. He came to view the destruction after its conclusion the follow-

ing morning. His looking was the viewing of a wise individual who wanted to observe the manifestation of G-d's justice. The Torah is contrasting the method in which an emotional person views the event, to the observation of one who is perfected. The former looks with a sense of despair, yearning, and commiseration. But one such as Abraham, looked to investigate, to comprehend, and to analyze the manner in which G-d's justice works. ■



Have your child say: “Abba let’s Learn!”

*Real world strategies to bring
love and curiosity back into your
child’s learning and strengthen
your relationship in the process*

RABBI PINCHAS ROSENTHAL

“I don’t want to learn and that’s it! I go to Yeshiva all week and I need a break!

Your son storms off and slams the door.

All you had done was innocently ask your son to learn on Shabbos afternoon. However, to your son it felt like asking a parolee to go back into solitary confinement. This is a painful experience for both father and son to say the least.

The Shema tells us that every father must be a teacher to his child, “V’limadtetem es b’naichem” (you shall teach your sons). It is true that sending our children to Yeshivot fulfills this obligation. However, many fathers rightfully want to learn with their children as well. This can be very difficult and a source of tremendous tension.

The following are 6 steps, which can greatly enhance the experience:

1) Create the incentive package-The Rambam in his famous “Introduction to Perek Chelek”, discusses the educational process of moving the child from learning “Lo Lishma” (not for its own sake) to learning “Lishma” (for its own sake). The Rambam list the progression of prizes that one

should award the child for learning beginning with developmentally appropriate tangible awards (i.e.candy, shoes, clothing, and money), and progressing to more intangible rewards such as being known as a famous rabbi. It is clear that we are not to expect our children to have an automatic love of learning. You should discuss the structure of the incentive package with your wife and confirm it with the child. Here is a list of common examples in developmental order: candy, exclusive trips to the ice cream parlor or favorite restaurant, toys, trading cards, baseball tickets, and cash. You can award the child individual points for good reading, questions and answers. You tell them at 75 or 100 points you will win the promised prize.

2) Set the time and place in advance with the “package”. For most children announcing that you would like to learn now will generally be met with conflict. Sit them down and inform them that you will be setting up a Seder with them (e.g. 1 hour before mincha every Shabbos). You will discuss/ negotiate the incentive package at that time.

3) Select the curriculum- do’s and don’ts – I would recommend that you provide your child with 2 or 3 choices of topic. I would only recommend learning school material if your child is interested in it. This is your time to bond with your child by learning your own special material. Suggestions include studying your own Parsha, a Sefer in Tanach, Mishnayot, a Sefer in the Mishne Torah, a sugya in the Gemara, and classic works on Hashkafah all depending on the level. You want to select an area, which your child (and you) will find interesting and relevant. Ideally, you should pick an area which can be covered in a realistic amount of time allowing the child to feel a sense of accomplishment when you complete the unit.

4) Know the world of your child – As an effective teacher; it is critical that you understand the world your child. For example, if your son loves the Yankees and only talks and preoccupies himself with all aspects of baseball, then that is his world. It is counterproductive to fight it or diminish it (“don’t you know that is just bitul Torah” or “with that memory of all the statistics you could know all of Shas”). Rather, a wise parent understands his child’s world and uses it to bring the reality of Torah to him. For example, you could elicit from him how Derek Jeter prepares to face a tough pitcher and thus develop the concept of “being in the zone”, a state where the athlete is able to remove all extraneous thoughts and focus exclusively on the task at hand. This could function as an introduction to halachot of Kavanah in Tefillah, where a person is required to sit and remove himself from his daily pursuits and

think exclusively of the world of Hashem. Always start from your child’s world and bridge to the world of Torah.

5) Prepare- Failing to prepare is preparing to fail! It is pure fantasy to think you are going to engage your son for an hour, by merely opening the sefer from where you left off last week. You have to digest the material first and determine what concepts are to be shared and how. This will ensure success.

6) Empower your child – Your son will ask great questions. Many of them you will not be able to answer. Tell him directly that you don’t know and that you will try to research the question. If you are unable to answer the questions, tell him, “let’s ask the Rabbi”. The fact that you think that his questions are important enough to research validates him as a thinker. This will give him a great sense of confidence and greater motivation to build this learning relationship with you.

If you have any questions, suggestions or ideas you can e-mail me at rabbipin@aol.com. Enjoy! ■

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SATAN & ABRAHAM

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Talmud Sanhedrin 89b: "And it was after these things, and G-d tested Abraham." (Genesis 22:1 regarding G-d's command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac).

"Rabbi Yochanan said in Rabbi Yosi ben Zimra's name, 'after these things' refers to 'after the words of Satan'. As it says, 'the lad grew and was weaned.' Upon which Satan said to G-d, 'Master of the world, this old man (Abraham) you graciously gave a child at 100 years of age. At all his feasts, did he not have one turtledove or one pigeon to offer to you? G-d said, 'Has he done this only for his son? If I would say sacrifice your son before me, he would do so. ' Immediately G-d tested Abraham saying take 'na' (please) your son....' Rabbi Simeon ben Abba said 'na' refers only to a pleaded request.' This is allegorical to an earthly king who fought many wars and was victorious through the help of a great warrior. In time, the king was faced with a very strong battle. He pleaded with the warrior, 'stand with me in this battle, so my previous battles won't be disparaged saying there were no previous successes'. So too is the case here, G-d pleaded with Abraham, 'I tested you with many trials, and you were triumphant in them all. Now, stand though this test so they should not say there were no real triumphs in your previous trials.'"

Was does it mean that G-d pleaded with Abraham? What is the concept being taught that the purpose in Abraham's trial required sacrificing his son? It seems it is only a response to Satan. Who does Satan represent here?

Sometimes, Satan refers to the person himself, i.e., Abraham, his own instincts. But this is not the case here. Abraham was telling G-d something negative about himself. To whom can Satan refer? I believe it is the people of the land, those who seek to mock Abraham.

Upon Abraham "celebrating" his son's physical maturity, this raised suspicion among the people as to Abraham's true level of perfection. The people (Satan) harbored feelings that Abraham was not as

great as he made himself out to be. Perhaps they were astounded at his ability to have a child at 100 years of age. The people of the land were jealous of G-d's divine intervention with Abraham. Why did this pose such jealousy? People saw someone as righteous as Abraham, being successful in all of his trials. His trials were undoubtedly publicized as the allegory teaches, and such perfection in Abraham conveyed to them by contrast, their own lack of perfection. They were jealous and felt animosity towards Abraham.

Why jealousy and animosity? They sought to degrade his perfection, portraying him no better than they are. Belittling Abraham's triumphs over G-d's trials, they can now live with themselves. They no longer feel less than perfect, as Abraham himself is not perfect. They can say, "If Abraham couldn't pass the hardest test, he probably didn't pass the easier ones". The people - referred to here as Satan - harbored the notion that Abraham would not sacrifice Isaac and he could not achieve ultimate perfection. In order to substantiate to the world that man can indeed reach perfection, G-d commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. G-d's will is that His desired lifestyle for man be displayed as achievable, not something so lofty that no man can succeed. To teach the world that man can reach the heights of perfection, G-d instructed Abraham in this most difficult trial. It is recorded as G-d "pleading" with Abraham, to teach us that such a trial is essential for mankind to witness.

We learn that this trial of sacrificing Isaac was not only to actualize Abraham's own perfection, but it was also designed to teach us that G-d's desired perfection for mankind is within reach. When the world sees a man who can perfect himself to such a degree, it removes all rationalizations posed by weaker peoples, which justify their continued laziness and lack of perfection. But now that Abraham passed this test too, the world must admit that G-d's plan for man is achievable - by all mankind. Abraham's ultimate trial teaches such a valuable lesson; that G-d's will is achievable.

Our metaphor means that Abraham - the warrior - made G-d's system successful on many occasions. He followed and taught G-d's monotheism, and perfected his character traits. But people still felt if Abraham doesn't stand the toughest test, he is nothing. They sought justification for their immoral lives. G-d "pleaded" with His warrior to help Him succeed in this great battle - sacrificing Isaac. G-d could not win the battle Himself, as the only victory (G-d proving His system as perfect and within man's reach) must be through mortal man and the use of his free will. Only by a man - Abraham - displaying such devotion to G-d, will G-d's system emerge victorious, and achievable. ■

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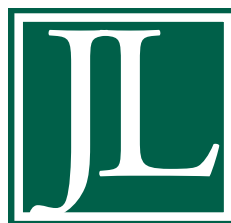
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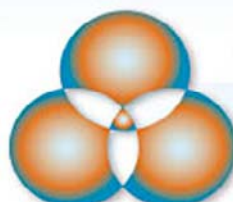
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